

THE \$1,000,000.00 MYSTERY

(By Harold McGrath)

11TH EPISODE

(PRINTED IN THE CLIMAX-MADISONIAN EVERY WEDNESDAY.)

SHOWN AT THE OPERA HOUSE THURSDAY NIGHT)

Today she was an onion ship; which precludes any idea of adventure. She was about four thousand tons, and her engines were sternward and her masts amidship. She carried two masts and a half dozen holst booms, and the only visible sign of anything new on her was her bowsprit. This was new doubtless because she had poked her nose too far into her last slip.

Her crew was orderly and tractable. There were shore drunks, to be sure, because they were sailors; but they were at work. They moved about briskly, for they were on the point of sailing for the Bahamas—perhaps for more onions. Presently the windlass creaked and shrilled, and the blosby links, much in need of tar paint, red as fish gills, clattered down into the chain. As it came over, but paint was costly, and this was done only when the anchor threatened to stay on the bottom.

There was a sailor among this crew, and he went by the name of Steve Blossom; and he was one of his kind. A grimy dime novel protruded rakishly from his hip pocket, and his right cheek was swollen as with the toothache, due, probably, to a generous "chaw" of Seaman's Delight. He was a real tobacco chewer, for he rarely spat. He was as peaceful as a back-water bay in summer; non-argumentative and passive, he stood his watch in fair weather and foul.

No one gave the anchor any more attention after it came to rest. The great city over the way was fairly like in its haziness and softened lines. It was the poetry of angles, of shafts and spars of stone; and Steve Blossom, having a moment to himself, leaned against the rail and stared regretfully. He had been generously drunk the night before, and it was a pleasant recollection. Chance led his glance to trail down the cutwater. His neck stretched from his collar like a turtle's from its shell.

"Well, I'll be hornswoggled!" he murmured, shifting his cud from starboard to port.

Caught on the fluke of the anchor was the strangest looking box he had ever laid eyes on. There were leather and steel bands and diamond-shaped

onions of the Gilson house. "Onions!" Quite unconsciously he spoke this word aloud.

"Huh? Well, if ye don't like onions, find a hooker that packs violets in her hold," was the cheerful advice of the man at Steve's elbow.

"Who's talkin' t' you?" grunted Steve. "Wha' did I say?"

"Onions, ye lubber! Don't we know what onions is? Ain't ye smelt 'em so long that ye could stick yer nose in 't' starboard light an' never smell no kerosene? Onions! Pass th' cawfy."

Steve helped himself first. The man who spoke barked over him, and they were not on the best of terms. There was no real reason for this frank antagonism; simply, they did not splice any more effectually than cotton rope and hemp splice. Sailors are moody and superstitious; at least they generally are on hookers of the "Captain Manners" breed. Steve was superstitious and Jim Dunkers was moody and had no thumb on his left hand. Steve hated the sight of that red nubbin. He was quite certain that it had been a whole thumb once, on the way to gouge out somebody's eye, and had inadvertently connected with somebody's teeth.

Spanish doubloons and pearls and diamonds and rubies! It was mighty hard not to say these words out loud, too; blame them into the sullen faces grouped around the table. He was off watch till midnight; and he was wondering if he could get the box without attracting the attention of the lookout, who had a devilish keen eye for everything that stirred on deck or on water. Well, he would have to risk it; but he would wait till full darkness had fallen over the sea and the lookout would be compelled to keep his eyes off the deck. The boys wanted him to play cards.

"Not for me. Busted. How long d'ye think '40 'll last in New York, anyhow?" And he stalked out of the fore-castle and went down into the waist to enjoy his evening pipe, all the while keeping a weather eye forward, at the ratty old pilot house.

It was ten o'clock, land time, when he rammed his cutty into a pocket and resolutely walked forward. If

enemies, he saw an enemy even in his shadow.

At four o'clock he turned in and slept like a log.

In the morning he found his opportunity. For half an hour the forecastle was empty of all save himself. Feverishly he pried back the boards, found the brace beam, and gently laid the box there. It was a mighty curious looking box. Once he had stoked up the Chinese coast from the Philippines, and he judged it to be Chinese in origin. He tried to pry open the cover and felt his eyes upon the ivory and mother of pearl was imperious steel. It would take an ax or a crowbar to stir that lid. He sighed. He replaced the boards, and became to all appearances his stolid self again.

But all the way down to the Bahamas he was moody, and when he swore any questions it was with words spoken testily and jerkily.

"I know what's th' matter," said Dunkers. "He's in love."

"Shut your mouth!"

"Didn't I tell yuh?" laughed the tallizer, dancing toward the companionway. "Steve's in love, 'r he didn't git drunk enough on shore t' satisfy his whale's belly!"

A boot thudded spitefully against the door jamb.

"You fellows let me alone, 'r I'll bash in a couple o' heads!"

"O, yuh will, will yuh?" cried Dunkers from the deck. "If yuh want a little exercise, yuh can begin on me, yuh moonshine swab! What's th' matter with yuh, anyhow? Where'd yuh git this grouchy? What've we done t' yuh? Huh?"

"You keep out o' my way, that's all. I'm mindin' my watches, an' don't ask no odds o' you duffers. What if I have a grouchy? Is it any o' your business?"

All right. When we step ashore at th' Bahamas, Mister Jim Dunkers, I'll tear the ropes out o' your pulley blocks. But till we git there, yuh t' th' upper bunk an' me t' mine."

"Leave th' o' grouchy alone, Jim. Th' mate won't stand for no scurragin' aboard. We'll have th' thing done right in th' custom sheds. We'll have a finish fight, Queensberry rules, an' may th' best man win."

"I'm Jim," said Jim. "So'm I," agreed Steve. But his intentions were not honorable. He proposed to desert before any fight took place. Not that he was physically afraid; no; he wanted to dig his hands deep into those doubloons and pieces of eight.

So the four days down passed otherwise uneventfully, and on the last day Steve was going to buy it and hang it over the entrance of the (Gilson house) slithered down into the smiling waters of the bay, Steve concluded that discretion was the better part of valor. He would steal ashore on the quarantine tug which lay alongside. He was willing to fight under ordinary circumstances, but he must get his treasure in safety first. They could call him a wetcher if they wanted to; devil it did he care. So he pried back the boards of his bunk wall, took out the box, eyed it fondly, and noted for the first time the lettering on it:

STANLEY HARGREAVE.

He wrinkled his brow in the effort to recall a pirate by that name, but was unsuccessful. No matter. He hugged the box under his coat and made for the gangway, and inadvertently ran into his enemy.

Dunkers caught a bit of the box peeping from under the coat.

"What a yuh got there?" he demanded truculently.

"None o' your damn business! You lemme by; hear me?"

"Ain't none o' my business, huh? Where'd yuh git a box like that? Steal it? By cripes, I'm goin' t' have a look at that box, my hearty. It don't smell like honest onions."

"You lemme by," breathed Steve, with murder in his heart.

Suddenly the two men closed, surged back and forth, one determined to take and the other to hold this mysterious box. Dunkers struggled to uphold his word; not that he really wanted the box but to prove that he was strong enough to take it if he wanted to. The name on the box flashed and disappeared. It was a kind of shock to him. He and Blossom went battering against the rail. Dunkers' grip slipped and so did Blossom's. The result was that the box was catapulted into the sea. With an agonizing cry, Blossom leaned far over. He saw the box oscillate for a moment, then sink gracefully in a zigzag course, down through the blue waters. Fear and fainter it grew, and at last vanished.

"I'm sorry, Steve; but yuh wouldn't let me look at it," said Dunkers, contritely.

"Damn you; I'm goin' t' kill y' for that!"

It became a real fight this time, fist and foot, tooth and nail; one mad with lust to kill and the other desperately intent on living. It was one of those contests in which honor and fair play have no part. But for the timely arrival of the captain and some

of the crew Dunkers would have been badly injured, perhaps fatally. They hauled back Blossom, roaring out his oaths at the top of his lungs. It took half an hour's arguing to calm him down. Then the captain demanded to know what it was all about. And blubbering, Steve told him.

"Six hundred feet of water, if I've got my reckoning right. The anchor lies in 60 feet, but the starboard side drops sheer 600. You swab! Why didn't you bring the box to me? A man has a right to what he finds. I'd have taken care of it for you till we got back to port. I know; you were greedy; you thought I might want to stick my fist into your treasure. And you'll never find it in 600 feet of water and tangled, porous coral. That's what you get for being a blamed hog. As for you," and the captain turned to Dunkers, "get your dunnage and your pay and hunt for another boat back. I won't have no murder on board 'Cap-

tain Manners.' And the sooner you go, the better."

"I'll go, sir," said Dunkers, readily enough. Had the misfortune happened to him and had Blossom been the aggressor, he would want his life. He understood. Like the valet in "Olivette," it was the time for disappearing.

"An' keep out o' my way. I'll git y' yet," growled Blossom.

"Keep your mouth shut," said the mate, "or I'll have you put in irons, yuh pig!"

"All right, sir. I've said all I'm goin' t' say 'day," and Blossom strode off.

"What was the box like?" asked the captain of Dunkers.

"Chinese contraption, sir; leastwise it looked that way to me. Didn't look as if it'd been in th' water long, sir. Somethin' lost overboard by some private yacht, 'r my thinkin'." I'll keep out o' Steve's way. I'll lay low on shore, sir."

And though Steve made a perfect range of the spot, he never came back to find the mysterious box, never saw the Gilson house back home, nor did he ever see Dunkers again.

On the voyage home he brooded continually, and was frequently found blubbering; and one night he skipped his watch and went to Davy Jones' locker.

Dunkers had not told about the name he had seen on the box; and Blossom had not thought to tell the name Hargrave had instantly brought back to Dunkers' mind the newspaper stories he had recently read. There was no doubt in the world that this box belonged to the missing millionaire, who had drawn a million from his banks and vanished; and, moreover, there was no doubt in Dunkers' mind that this million lay in the Bahaman waters. It had been drawn up from the bottom of the sound, under the path of the balloon.

Then, to take a most minute range, it would require money and partners; but half a loaf would be far better than no loaf at all; and he was determined to return to New York to find backing. Finding is keeping, on land or sea.

Now it happened that his favorite grog shop was a cheap saloon across the way from the headquarters of the Black Hundred; and Vroon occasionally dropped in, for he often picked up a valuable bit of maritime news. Dunkers was an old friend of the bar-keeper, and he proceeded to pour and guzzle down his throat a very poor substitute for whisky. He became communicative. He bragged. He knew where there was a million, and all he needed was a first-class diving bell. A year from now he would not be drinking cheap whisky; he'd be steering a course up and down Broadway and buying wine when he was thirsty. He was no miser. But he had to have a diving bell; and where the blue devil could he get one with \$12 and an ingersoll watch in his pocket?

From his table Vroon made a sign which the bartender understood. Then he rose and approached Dunkers.

"I own a pretty good diving apparatus," he said. "If you've got the goods, I'll take a chance on a fifty-fifty basis." Vroon did not believe there was anything back of his talk; but it always paid to dig deep enough to find out. "Have a drink; and, Bill, give us a real wetchy and none o' your soap-y. Now, let's hear your yarn."

"I don't know yuh," said Dunkers, with drunken caution. "How is it, Bill?" turning to the bartender.

"He's the goods, Jim. You've heard of Wyant & Co.?"

"Sure I've heard o' them. Best divin' apparatus they is. Mr. Brooks, general manager for Wyant & Co. I can O. K. him."

Vroon threw an appreciative glance at the bartender. He was not affiliated with the Black Hundred, but he had often aided Vroon in minor affairs.

"All right, if yuh say so, Bill. Well, here's th' yarn."

And he had done, Vroon smoked quietly without speaking.

And That is Why Jones Was Able, Some Weeks Later, to Hide Once More the Original Box.

CHAPTER XIII.

An Agent From Russia.

The Black Hundred, not as individuals but as an organization, began to worry. Powerful, and often reckless and daring because it was powerful, it began to look about for some basic cause for all these failures against Hargrave's daughter and Hargrave's ghost. They had tried to put the investigative reporter out of the way; they had laid every trap they could think of to catch the mysterious visitor at the Hargrave home; they had thrown out a hundred lures to bring Hargrave out of his lair, and failed; and they had lost a dozen valuable men and several thousand dollars. This must end somewhere, and quickly.

The one ray of hope for the conspirators lay in the fact that Florence had never seen her father and knew not in the least what he looked like. They determined to try again in this direction.

"Give it all up," said the countess to Braine. "I tell you, whatever is back of all this is stronger than we are. He knows the organization, and for all we know he may be a ghost."

"I never go back," smiled Braine. "There's something more than the million. There's the sport of the thing. We've been bested in a dozen bouts, and nearly always by a fluke. They have the breaks, as they say out at the Polo grounds."

"But the time and expense when we might be getting results elsewhere! I tell you, Leo, I'm afraid. It's like always hearing some one behind you and never finding anybody when you turn. I have told you my doubts. I have also asked you to trap that butler, but you've always laughed."

"You are seeing ghosts, Olga. A new man from holy Russia. Evidently the head over there thinks our counter buttons of his chest have not been up to where there was a million, and all he needed was a first-class diving bell. A year from now he would not be drinking cheap whisky; he'd be steering a course up and down Broadway and buying wine when he was thirsty. He was no miser. But he had to have a diving bell; and where the blue devil could he get one with \$12 and an ingersoll watch in his pocket?"

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"Don't yuh believe it?" demanded Dunkers, truculently.

"But 600 feet of water, in a coral bottom, and no way of telling just where it fell overboard. That's a tough proposition."

"O, it is, is it? I'm a sailor. I can lay my hand right over 't' spot. Do yuh think I'd be fool enough t' hunt for it without a perfect range?" Dunkers tapped his coat pocket suggestively.

And Vroon knew that the one thing he wanted was there, a plan or a drawing of the range. So there was another man shanghaied that night, and his destination was Cape Town, 22 days' voyage by the calendar.

Vroon carried his information to the organization that same night. They would start the expedition at once, and till this was accomplished, Hargrave's daughter was to be immune from attacks. Besides, it would give Hargrave (wherever he was) and the others the idea that the Black Hundred had concluded to give up the chase.

Above, with his ear to a small hole, skillfully bored through the ceiling without permitting the plaster to fall, knelt a man with a bandaged arm. He could never see any faces; no one ever took off a mask in this sinister chamber. But there were voices, and he was going to forget some of them. After the meeting came to an end, he waited an hour after, and then stole down into the street by the aid of the fire escape. Later, he entered a telephone booth and called up Jones.

Then, one leathern and steel box, dotted with bits of ivory and mother-of-pearl, became two; and the second one was soaked in mud and salt water for two weeks till you could not have told it from the original. And that is why Jones was able, some weeks later, to hide once more the original box. As for the substitute, just as Braine was about to use a mallet and chisel upon it, the lights went out. There was a wild scramble, a chair or two was overturned.

"The door, the door!" shouted Braine, furious.

It slammed the moment the words left his lips. And as suddenly as they had gone out the lights sprang up. The box was gone. There were evidently traitors among the Black Hundred.

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